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IN · COLIMA · AND · OTHER
POEMS · BY · FRANCIS · SPEIR





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IN COLIMA

AND

OTHER POEMS

BY

FRANCIS SPEIR



NEW YORK CITY
1912

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IN COLIMA AND OTHER POEMS

IN COLIMA

Was it a sin?—Ah, there I am at sea,
Between the blind insistence of a soul
That will not cease from brooding on the past
And what our church, with no uncertain sound,
Approves, bidding me rest at peace with God.
The more I dwell upon the dreary day,
A heavier drag these latter days appear.
Confessions ease alone the itching tongue,
Yet leave the seething heart no lasting peace.
In sorrow have I lived, in sorrow die;
God wills it; may His name be ever praised!

At Crux, before the altar of the church,
Robed in my priestly garb, I knelt in prayer,
From early vespers on a Christmas Eve,
Until the dawn of blessed Christmas Day;
And all the burden of my prayer was peace,
That I might know no trace of troubled change,
Secure among my little flock might dwell,
Till Death should slowly steal my quiet days.

Then morning came, and with the growing dawn
God's love divine transformed my glowing soul.

In all the joy of newly answered prayer,
I fell from Heaven within the depths of Hell;
For, as I turned, there came a sudden sound
Of one who sinks in mortal agony.
Alas! there lay before my very eyes,
Among the flowers that decked the Virgin's shrine,

A man whom death had smitten at a blow:
Beside him crouched was one with lambent eyes
And pallid, upturned face, who, trembling, gazed
An instant; then I found him at my feet,
Pleading, with tears, by all my sacred vows,
To hear confession of repented sin.
Half-dazed, I gasped a timid, weak assent,
And heard him tell a tale of murder foul,
Of grievous guilt that closed in sacrilege.

Receiving penance that the Church appoints,
He turned and fled, absolved from guilt, and free,
His secret safe and hid from all the world
Beneath a seal the law could never break.

Thus God rebuked me, for I asked too much:
I wished for pleasant ease, and He had sent
This thorn, like Paul's, to prick my flesh and turn
My sunny days to years of darkened nights.

They found a stranger dead within the church;
The secret sin seemed hid forevermore.

A few months passed, and with their kindly touch
The earth seemed brighter and the sun more sweet;
Yet, in the end, there came a haggard man,
Who meekly begged that I should give him work,
To gain a shelter and his dole of bread.
Then clearly I perceived the hand of God,
Who willed that I should bear the heavy cross
Of close communion with a blood-stained soul.

Through five long years he toiled from morn to night,
With eager heart, to aid the Master's work,
Exact in all the rites our Church prescribes,
The kindest helpmate man had ever known.
Yet, in those years, my heart was ever torn—
My very sleep was haunted by two forms—

A slayer, and the slain who cried aloud
For vengeance.—Then I waked, to sleep no more.
Too well I knew that I was never born
To press against grave odds that try men's souls;
I slip and hesitate, and, shrinking, fall;
My place was in the plain of daily life.
But in His wisdom it is otherwise,
And when I strove to tread through mountain heights
I stumbled, halted, fell, and here I die.
God help me! I have suffered grievous pain.

Where was I, Father?—Yes, the coming end.
One Christmas, when I came from morning mass,
He met me in the little outer room
And, kneeling low, he smiled and slowly spake:
“Thou art the truest friend man ever knew;
Thy hand hath saved a sinful soul; yea, thou
Did'st find me naked and thou clothedst me,
Hungry and sore athirst, thou gavest me
The bread and water of immortal life;
Thou hast Christ's very spirit in thy soul.”

For death and sorrow man is doubly born;
I knew it, in my very heart of hearts,
Seeing the omen in his lustrous eyes
That presaged trouble hardly to be borne.
“Nay! hear thou must, for speak I must and shall—
Not to the priest, but to the kindly friend
Who all these years has ever truly shown
The tender pity that will vanquish all—
The love incarnate of the God made man.
This sinful life is thine, and thou must deal
With me, thy servant, as thou deemest best;
Naught shall be hid, but all be freely told.
I killed the stranger, for he foully stole
The only thing I loved on earth—my love!
Her soul and heart and body, all were mine;
He came—love ceased—bereft was I, and poor;

But when he, mocking, laughed with bitter taunt,
His days were numbered, and my hand struck true,
As he was praying at the sacred shrine."

I sought my cell, and there, half-fainting, moaned;
The unknown fear, corroding all my days,
Had taken form in stern reality.
What should I do? Ought I, a wretched worm,
For very weakness, fire the hidden mine,
Speak but the word, and bring the certain doom?
"Vengeance is mine, I will repay," saith God.
Twin duties seemed to stand on either side
And point two ways, with gauntly stretching hands.
I prayed for help, then chose the hardest course,
Resolved to cut the leash-strings of the law.
Then as I went, I heard my servant sing
A carol of the blessed Christmas-tide,
A song of peace and joy, good-will to men!

When they had seized him, I alone was called
To witness what he spake a few days back.
He made no plea, but welcomed death with joy.

Before the time appointed for the end,
He sent for me, with pleading, piteous words,
To hear his last confession ere he died,
And with these hands to give the sacrament.
Too weak! Too weak! I dared not venture more:
To see his face was death.

A stranger shrived
The doomed one, and he died in perfect peace,
Thanking the Lord for all my watchful care—
Ay, blessing me—that sting of bitterness!
If he had only cursed me, I could rest;
But with that blessing sounding in my ears,
I see his blood upon these poor, thin hands.
Proving forgiveness was not meant for me.

There is no comfort, no, nor peace in life!
Oh, tell me, is there any lasting hope
Beyond the grave for one whose sin is mine?

*These words upon his lips, before he took
The holy sacrament, his spirit fled,
To stand before the judgment bar of God!*

A SONG OF THE ARMADA

St. James! St. James for Jesus' sake! St. James for royal
Spain!

May God protect his Holy Church and rend her foes in twain!

Our great Armada fills the sea, majestic in its might,
The hope and pride of Spain are here to battle for the right.

What foe can stand against our force, when God directs the
way

To punish those who turn aside and succor those who pray?

In England sudden terror comes in place of jeers and scorn,
The nobles waver in their faith, the Queen grows weak and
worn.

Their puny ships will slink aside, their boastful captains flee,
And all their armies melt like snow, when once our strength
they see.

Be wise, ye foolish! Bow to fate! Your weakness bids you
yield.

From Philip's swift and righteous wrath the Church will be
your shield.

Oh, blessed Virgin, save their souls! Incline their hearts
to grace;

Let Peter's throne rule every land throughout the realms of
space!

If they, besotted, still shall choose to cleave to deadly sin,
Destroy the nation with a curse, and let Thy wrath begin!

Then, rich with wealth and fertile fields, bestowed by right
divine,
Our loyal sons will pay their vows at every English shrine;

In stately minsters, snatched from sin, our ancient rites
resound,
While conquered England, smitten sore, lies prostrate on the
ground.

In dark despair Elizabeth regrets her deeds, too late;
She dreams of Scotland's murdered queen, and dreads the
hand of fate.

Ye winds and waves, be strong! be true! till land at length is
made.
All nature shows a smiling face, to speed the great crusade.

Be swift, O day! Pass quickly, night! The end has come
at last;
To-morrow's sun will see us strike with sword and trumpet
blast!

St. James! St. James for Jesus' sake! St. James for royal
Spain!
May God protect His Holy Church, and rend her foes in
twain!

THE SAVING OF LEYDEN

God's horn be high exalted! To Him we bow the knee,
Who smote to earth the mighty, and made our Leyden free!

Ten thousand Spanish troopers encompassed us around;
With fierce assault they smote us, but still we held our ground.

We swore by Christ, our Saviour, that Leyden should not fall
A prey to Spanish fury—nay, rather, death for all!

We labored long and stoutly, we toiled by day and night,
Though fever claimed our dearest and few were left to fight.

Through months of dreary waiting we watched each troubled
day,
Till dark despair, arising, drove hope and heart away.

Then loud the cowards murmured: "Where is the Prince you
trust?
He lives, forgetting Leyden; he sleeps, so yield we must.

Make terms—not all should suffer—a change will bring relief—
Our dear ones die from hunger, our wives grow wan with grief—

Full pardon Valdes proffers—a truce to all our hates—
Accept his solemn promise, and open quick the gates!"

Then by St. Pancras' doorway our Burgomaster stood,
And clear his voice was sounding—thank God, his words were
good!

Look you to wolves for mercy? for pardon look to Spain?
Then turn to Hell for safety, for all your hopes are vain!

Leyden yields, then Holland, dismembered, cannot stand;
She falls, a helpless victim, the spoil of Philip's hand.

While I am here among you this city still shall fight,
Through fever and starvation, unmoved by fear from right.

If you have turned to treason, take this my sword today
And thrust it through my body—then yield without delay!

Why gain a life by yielding, when worse than death remains,
If Spain shall spare our bodies, yet bind our souls with chains?

No! Die like men of Holland, with faces to the foe!
Our country bids her children to smite before they go!"

Thus Adrian won the people, and Valdes' plots were foiled,
But grewsome was the waiting, as wearily we toiled.

There came a hope of rescue—the message came at last,
And with it, life and courage that dimmed the dreadful past.

The Prince of Orange promised, before the week went by,
The sea should swallow Holland, yet leave our city dry.

The dikes at last are sundered, the land is covered now
With rush of mighty waters—the Prince has kept his vow.

His ships have reached our city, the prayed-for help appears;
Like mist the foe has scattered, and vanished are our fears.

Fast flee the frightened Spaniards, from Leyden fast they flee;
They dread God's intervention, and cannot fight the sea.

Where now are Philip's butchers, that fought with sword and
flame?

Where are the bloody hirelings that wrought his deeds of
shame?

Oh, many, drowned, are floating upon the water's face,
And others quake in Bruges, bewailing their disgrace.

In Burgos, sick and troubled, King Philip fears anew
The waning of an empire that cannot crush the few.

But here in joyous Leyden the bells sound loud and long;
In place of sobs and wailing we meet but smiles and song.

O men rejoice for Freedom! A fight is fought and won;
No more shall Spain enslave you; the despot's day is done!

God's horn be high exalted! To Him we bow the knee,
Who smote to earth the mighty and made our Leyden free!

THE VENGEANCE OF DE GOURGES

There was peace between King Philip and our Valois court of
France,
Gained to check the taint of Luther, leaving naught to time
or chance.

Yet in war the cruel Spaniards sailed across the Western sea
To the land of Carolina, where were men who would be free.

In his insolence of power, Philip vowed that all should heed
How his royal wrath would punish those who dared to choose
their creed.

This was Philip's written order—this his captain's hand
receives—
“Let them perish, not as Frenchmen, but as heretics and
thieves!”

So they sailed, those Spanish soldiers, and ere many weeks
had passed
They were stirred with joy of battle, as they neared the goal
at last.

Then by stealth they stormed the fortress—to the Huguenots'
dismay—
Naught could check the rushing onset of the strong and fierce
array.

Truce was asked, and parley followed; quickly were the terms
prepared—
“Arms and wealth to be surrendered; yielding these, all lives
are spared.”

Down they tore our Royal Ensign; Philip's banner took its
place—
Spanish triumph?—Spanish shambles! God will ever curse
their race!

Foully slain was every captive; plighted faith was set at
naught;
“Slay the dogs!” cried base Menendez; “Spare not one whom
Calvin taught!”

While the butchered men and matrons moaned their piteous
dying cry,
Round them standing, priests were singing songs of praise to
God on High.

Loudest sang the monk Menendez—Cursed by book and ban
be he!
May he lead his master's chorus at the Devil's Jubilee!

Did the Regent beard the lion, asking justice for the slain,
Vengeance for the murdered Frenchmen, slaughtered by the
hands of Spain?

Nay, there rose no word of anger; naught was heard but ribald
jest.
Weak, complaisant, craven cowards were our rulers at their
best.

Then we dreamed of double vengeance—France to strike and
Spain to pay;
If a throne is dead to honor, men must seek another way.

I, de Gournes, then planned and plotted. Does not Scripture
say, forsooth,
Smite the wicked, slay and spare not? eye for eye and tooth
for tooth?

Stout and stubborn were the seamen that assembled at my call;
Lands were sold and ships were gathered; naught was left; we
spent our all.

Secretly, we wended westward towards the Fort of Caroline,
Where the River, passing slowly, flows by oak and flows by
pine.

Fair and peaceful seemed the prospect as we leaped to land
once more;
Not a sound betrayed our coming to the Spaniards on the
shore.

Scarce a hundred did we muster, men of might, in battle tried;
Recked we naught of thrice our number—with the Lord upon
our side.

Kneeling then, we prayed for vengeance.—“Slay and spare
not” was our oath.
When the day had come and vanished, well had we remembered
both.

Thirty score of Spaniards were they, never dreaming of their
fate;
When we sprang, with sword uplifted, then they learned it—
and too late.

Helpless, crushed, and terror-stricken, how they fled! But
everywhere
Grim avengers followed, smiting. Hope was dead, for death
was there.

Last of all, we hung their leader, with his captains, on a tree,
Placing there a great inscription, writ for all that came to see:

“Here are Spaniards slain by Frenchmen; not the Spaniards
do we kill,
But accursed women-slayers, earning well the place they fill!”

Then we left. Our task was finished; we had wiped from
France her shame,
Shown the world that human devils could not hide beneath a
name.

What did follow matters little, for when great Coligny died
None was left to hold me harmless from the wrath of Philip's
pride.

Weary were those years of exile, till at length my soul was
cheered,
Finding England roused to action; then the longed-for day
appeared.

God be praised! There dwell in Devon men who only live
to take
Swift revenge for sons and brothers burnt by Spaniards at the
stake.

Thrice the English ships have smitten; thrice has Philip writhed
in fear,
Losing heart and knowing surely that his evil day draws near.

Deadly is the coming duel. Spain may rise before her fall.
And the end I see full clearly, by the writing on the wall.

Let me live to see her downfall! Or, if doomed to sudden
death,
I shall die mid fleeing Spaniards, smiting till my latest breath!

Then my soul on earth shall linger, waiting till the Lord shall
send
Judgment, swift and overwhelming, and the might of Spain
shall end!

AFTER THE EDICT
HENRY IV. WITH GABRIELLE D'ESTREES

Dearest, cares are ever pressing; I am wearied—let us rest
Here, beside the castle terrace, where the sunset glow is best.

Through this day my mind has wandered in a dreary maze of
time,
Half regretful of my action—was it duty, or a crime?

I have signed the edict granting to the Huguenots the right
Of maintaining their religion, not in secret, but in sight.

Oh, they plot and mutter treason, dream of aid from English
Bess.
Naught but failure crowns their scheming, yet it hurts me,
none the less.

If their creed would only let them sip life's joys, with song and
smile,
Or would turn their thoughts to Heaven, far from me and
things so vile!

From their doctrine comes rebellion; in its essence there is
born
Doubt of creed, and kings, and rulers—and the doubts all
promise scorn.

I foresee the coming ending, in the course of earthly things,
When the iron creed of Calvin will destroy the power of kings.

Thrice their bold and stubborn preachers have, before my
very face,
Dared to beard the Lord's Anointed—called our love a foul
disgrace!

Priests can preach how God intended that the vulgar should
obey
Each of all his ten commandments, but beyond they shall not
stray!

Rome knows better—in her bosom you meet little of reproof;
If you bow, there is complaisance while you dwell beneath
her roof.

Just the trifle makes life easy—sin confessed is sin atoned—
Penance paid, there is a future—clean, with all the past
condoned.

Dear, you know my day of trial, when to choose the wrong
course meant
For our country sure destruction—death for me the punish-
ment.

I was harried by the struggle; then so weary of my state,
Chance, mayhap, or something higher—call it luck, or call it
fate—

Intervened, and pointed plainly—if I wanted peace or home
I must leave the old religion, turn and bow the knee to Rome.

Ah! the Virgin's intercession never broke down error's shield,
Nor did Perron's graceful pleading win my soul or make me
yield:

Thanks alone are due to Sully—he whose keen and subtle
brain
Gave me France and kept her scathless from the hated hand
of Spain.

Yes, I called the priests and listened through a weary score of
days,
Stifling yawns and feigning pleasure, interposing just delays;

Till at length their prayers were answered, heart and conscience touched indeed;
Rome received the erring sinner, promised help in all my need.

Was it better to live, thwarted, fighting for a tithe of France—
Party leader, without feeling,—heretic by circumstance—

Or, to drop a creed that cramped me, through St. Denis' aisles to pass,
Through submission made a ruler?—Was this Kingdom worth a mass?

Aye, my dearest, worth ten thousand, though each mass were deadly sin,
And the mouth of Hell stood ready, yawning wide, to take me in!

Change was needed; France was stricken, and the middle party all
Steadfast held the Roman worship,—heard, but spurned Geneva's call.

Satisfied, unchanged, unchanging, in the mass she saw no harm,
Recking naught of solemn doctrines, in long sermons found no charm.

But her king could not be alien to the instincts of his race;
He must share the nation's feeling, or he could not gain the place.

So I crossed, accursed by bigots, to the League a leprous name;
To the Huguenots a Judas, lost to Heaven, and dead to shame.

Equal rancor stirred them hotly, common hatred served them well,
And for once they both united—in consigning me to Hell.

At my birth a kingly grandsire stamped my fate with potent
sign,
On my lips he pressed the garlic, in my mouth the Gascon
wine.

Not with groans my mother bore me, but with laughter and
with song,
And the sounds of gracious singing ever echo, loud and long.

Thus my life was made and moulded, turned from gloom to
joy and jest;
In misfortune never flinching, ever hoping for the best.

O my dear heart, tender loved one! you alone this Henry
know;
To the world I mask my feelings, but to you my heart I show,

Open up the inner nature, lay myself before your feet;
In your smile I breathe my triumphs, in your frown my worst
defeat.

Patient have I toiled, unceasing, hoped that healing time would
bring
Unity to this my people, peace and comfort to their King.

But on two sides stand two parties, waiting merely for new
breath,
Then to show God greater glory by a brother Frenchman's
death.

That God's worship?—Sick, disheartened—better brand the
whole a lie—
Turn my back and show my courage, cursing such a God—and
die!

Twin, unchanged, conflicting spirits mingled through my
country's life,
When the few opposed the many, where the years but promised
strife.

What was needed? Something, surely—St. Bartholomew's
anew?—

Nay, the Valois in their folly drank too deep that Devil's brew.

For, if men will cling to Calvin, it is idleness to hope
That by burning sinful bodies you can make them love the
Pope.

Philip tried it in his Holland, vowing with a solemn vow
He by fire would purge the country—Where is Philip's Hol-
land now?

Then I thought of Arques and Ivry—all the glories of the
past—
How with hymns they marched to battle, grimly fighting to
the last.

Stern and hard they toiled, unceasing, text on tongue and
sword in hand,
Fighting for their cause and leader, striving to redeem the land.

Round me stood the grim old warriors, men whose faces ever
turned
Towards the foe, content to perish, in whose souls true valor
burned.

Snarling, pressed the wolves of Leaguers, howling for the fire
and stake,
Hungry for a few more victims, for the blessed Jesus' sake.

Yet the swords with psalms availed more. I, indeed, remember
then
Vowing, "They shall have full justice!"—God Almighty!
they were men!

Justice! They have more than justice in this edict wrung
from me,
With my hundred towns as pledges that their worship shall be
free.

Firm they stood, and dared to bargain—would not stoop to
beg for aid—
Ventre Saint Gris! I owe them nothing; all my debts are
more than paid.

* * * * *

Let us go, forgetting kingcraft. Damp and cold the mists
arise,
Yet near you my cares all vanish, in the sunlight of your eyes.

Would to God my bonds were loosened! I would make you
Queen and wife,
Could I break that Valois marriage. You would glorify my
life!

VOLTAIRE TO FREDERICK THE GREAT
AN APOLOGIUM

O, mighty King, Philosopher, and Sage!
Why squander time from sweet Olympian toil
Of penning sonnets, or of filching crowns,
To search the motives and to weigh the thoughts
That make me what I am—the man Voltaire?
Plain are your words, but plainer far the scorn
Shown by the tripping “Why?” of mockery.

*“Calas was dead—a fool was killed by fools—
Why not a shrug, then turn the more to mock,
Knowing the world is peopled most by fools?
Yet strange are Fate's inscrutable decrees:
Mayhap approaching death hath brought Voltaire
To love the idol which is labelled Faith.
Thrice pleasant sight, if we shall see installed
The mocker as the shepherd of the sheep!
In Calvin's triumph, is the wolf at rest?
God help the frightened lambs of Mother Rome!”*

O, tender critic and most loving friend,
You childish poet, with a Caesar's brain!
From higher realms of human life that lie
Beyond the limits of your little world
Came forth a voice that thrilled my very soul
And brought my being captive to its sway.
Therein lies all the web of mystery.
That voice was conscience, clear and stern and strong,
Epitomizing ethics in itself;
It showed me Freedom's cause in bold relief,
Ignoring lesser rights, as ills that hid
The great white beacon light of liberty.

The world, before I came, lay bound in chains,
A wretched captive, cowed by brutal force:
To think was evil, and to speak was crime:
A whispered word against the despot's will,
Murmured in secret, with a muttered sigh,
Brought down the dread familiars with their flame,
Panting to teach the lesson by the doom.
False was the life, and false the vicious laws;
Yet, ruling all, in arrogance of pride,
Holding this life and claiming Heaven as well,
Towered the Church supreme, the primal source
Of error, and the cornerstone of wrong.
Justice was dead; for villainies unmasked
Served as the faithful children of the Church,
Sounding her praise in high-pitched notes of fear,
And knowing naught but what she wished as law.
Oh, bitter foe! the one, unconquered Rome!
Ever before my mind Erasmus came—
Blood-brother of the past, in whom I found
My spleen and very note of ridicule,
The touch of genius, and the gift of speech.
Yet he but faltered when he should have struck;
Slinking aside, he whined for peace, in vain,
To hide dishonor in a traitor's grave.
Awed by this depth of endless misery,
In doom decreed for countless hosts unborn,
I cried aloud in bitterness of soul—
"Who shall unloose the fetters from the slaves?"

All hope was vain without the help of power,
So I grew famous, that I might be feared
As judge of manners and as scourge of men.
With wealth of knowledge and in biting words
I proved the falsehood of a hundred forms,
Jarring the altar horns behind the veil,
Till startled priestcraft cried in vain for help
To save the treasured idols of the cave.
I cursed the root, and mocked the perfect flower,

Confused the essence with its accidents,
And by a subtle turn held up to scorn
The mongrel doctrine and the borrowed rites,
The sorry mixture of the East and West,
Mingled together in twice tawdry whole,
Known as the Holy Church of Christendom.

No weapon was too weak if it could wound
Aught of the source that brought man half his woe.
When lies were needed, from my tongue came lies,
Matchless in form and with envenomed sting,
That quickly turned to gangrene of distrust
And spread their deadly poison far and wide.
Lest I should suffer and my work should cease,
I groveled on the ground when trouble came,
Licking the feet of power upon the throne,
And wailed "Peccavi" till the world believed
My wanton words spoke for a stricken heart,
Repenting of its sin.

Through troubled years
Hard was the struggle, barren the result
In wrongs removed, in rights made manifest.
I found at length that error would not yield
To truth or wit, or truth and wit combined.
Futile is wit that titillates the ear,
Holding the fancy captive but an hour;
Empty the hard-fought honors of a smile,
A muttered curse, and then forgetfulness!

When cares pressed sore, my thoughts would ever turn
Back from the present to that sacred line
Of dauntless heroes, dead and gone, who fought
The losing fight and fell—but not in vain,
Since they had kept the hope of liberty,
Yielding their lives to save its holy fire.
From out the silent grave there seemed to come
A murmur of the voices of the past,
Blended together in a benison

That gave me strength and patience to endure.
Dark were the hours ere cloudless dawn appeared,
Bright with the hopes that I shall ever bless—
The dawn that prophesied the coming day
Wherein I found the might of tragedy
Incarnate, helpless, bleeding, dying, dead—
The hour when nature whispered in my ear,
“To win the people, you must make them weep,”
Pointing to Calas, innocent of crime,
Slain in the hope that men might think no more.
Then I perceived the glory and the crown
Of innocence made yet more manifest
Through crimeless death of lying infamy.
Away with words that come not from the heart!
Are they not toys before eternal truth?
The slaughtered Calas from his grave of shame
Shall rise, and by his death bring victory!

The world knows well the tale of Calas's end—
The priestly plottings and the perjured charge,
The travesty of Justice, under guise
Of consecrated form, the base canaille
Raging like tigers for the taste of blood,
The lying verdict, and a good man gone—
And all because within his house he chose
To pray to God in execrable French,
In place of using nice Latinity,
And, like the rabble, cringing low
To priestly pomp and crowned authority.
With Calas dead, they were not satisfied,
But made his name a curse before mankind,
In all the doom of shame unspeakable.
With force they seized his household and his wealth,
Tore from their mother's arms his helpless babes,
And thrust her forth to wander on the earth,
Weighted with chains of hopeless misery.

From morn till night, in words that could not die,
I told the tale of Calas and his wrongs,

Painting the scenes with strokes of living fire,
That men should know, who never knew before.
Then came a sudden waking, and the world
Arose in all the might of righteous wrath,
Unsatisfied with aught save justice done:
A cry for vengeance came from angry lips,
That Rome should in her turn be made to pay
For countless wrongs throughout uncounted years.
Ah, Rome has rued the day that Calas died!

The old has gone, and will no more return;
No longer do the galling chains oppress
The timid weak, or goad to death the strong;
Now people murmur, and the poor can moan,
Looking and longing for the coming day
When Freedom rules, and Tyranny shall die.

My foe still lives, but half her fangs are gone;
Hiding, she lurks beside the Tiber's stream,
A very shadow of the brutal beast
That in her prime had stifled Liberty,
And howled for joy when Galileo died.

In all my triumphs of these three score years
The crowning one was when I heard the words,
Spoken by some poor woman of the street—
“That is Voltaire, who saved poor Calas’ name!”
And then she smiled, and with her smile were tears.

Clearly I know that when, in years to come,
The dead are judged before the bar of Time,
My name shall live enshrined in human love,
Neither for wit that made that name a fear,
Nor for the genius that illumined all,
But for the travail of a soul that wrought
A toilsome task for Calas and the world.

OF BITTER CREEK, A. D. 1851

They tell me, Padre, that with you is power
To banish sin and ease the breaking heart.
Oh, hear me speak! Look eye to very eye!
Though knowing well my coming will be vain,
The God I curse mayhap hath ruled my way.

Long, aching years ago, in buoyant youth,
I left my home beside the eastern sea,
To journey west and seek the golden land;
Though on the way I sinned, and lost my soul.
This is the secret that my heart hath hid
Beneath a weary weight of tangled years.

Our road had left the plains for many days,
And reached the waste men call the "Mauvaises Terres,"
A dreary desert, white with alkali,
With naught of green but ashen, shrivelled sage;
On every side the gloomy "Bad Lands" rise—
Huge rocks whose sides the time-forgotten floods
Have weirdly cut and carved in curious forms—
Cathedrals, minarets, and obelisks—
Yes, every work that human hand hath wrought,
In gray and ghastly counterpart looms forth:
But there no trace of kindly life appears;
Gaunt, hungry death rules all with iron sway.
Beneath those cliffs I found the way to Hell,
Which he who finds must follow to the end,
Through sudden turns, down to the depths below.
There, too, I learned what vileness lies concealed,
Undreamed, unknown, within the human soul:
Too well I know—I found it in myself.

But one of all our train pressed on with me;
His name I never knew, nor whence he came,

Nor by what storm his life was cast adrift:
A proud and silent man, who seldom smiled,
Unmoved received the good, or shifting ill,
Nor deigned to show a sign of discontent.

One stifling day, as side by side we rode
Past scattered heaps of glistening, whitened bones,
That told a tale that any fool might read,
My weary horse fell dead, with gasping groan,
Leaving me dazed, to face dark, certain death.
So perished hope, and in my agony
No drowning man could see the past arise
More clearly, with its cruel, haggard lines.
Then as the present thrust the past aside
I cursed hot curses; why, I know no more
Than why I kicked the dead horse at my feet,
Or why—poor fool—I wander here for rest.

But I misjudged that man upon whose face
There curled a lurking smile of silent scorn.
One step he took, and touched his panting horse,
Then gruffly spoke: "One horse, two worthless men;
By turn we ride until the weakest dies."

At sunset we had made a halting place
Beside a pool of stagnant, brackish slime.
Full-orbed above the Buttes the moon arose;
Remorseless, cold and pitiless her gaze;
And through the clearness of a cloudless sky
Poured softly down upon our aching heads
A chilling stream of searching, deadly light.
There, while I tossed in troubled, restless sleep,
I dreamed the dreadful dream that cost my soul.
Oh, Padre! it is false that sleeping men
Know neither right nor wrong; for in that sleep
I sinned the awful sin that comes but once,
And, coming, claims the hapless soul enthralled.
I dreamed that while my comrade dwelt in sleep

I seized the horse and through the theft would live.
In clammy chill of conscious guilt I woke,
And prayed for saving grace, with heartfelt prayer.
The mocking moon looked down and only smiled.
Too late for prayer! The lust of life was waked.
Too late! and I was lost forevermore.
The devil bargained for a human soul;
I promised all, if I might only live.

At break of day we once more feebly strove
To win the wished-for slope beneath the range
That stretched beyond and towered in the west.
My comrade seemed content with every ill,
Serene and glad at heart to fight with fate,
Enduring all until the end should come
And find him still unconquered, conquering death.
Throughout that day, when in my turn I rode,
I dared not flee, but, trembling, feared his look,
Knowing a word would bring me slinking back
To whine and grovel at the master's feet.

The night came on, yet brought no soothing rest.
At length he slept, in heavy, senseless sleep.
My hour had come, the promised chance appeared.
With beating heart I reached the trembling horse,
Tight fixed the gear, then rode with stinging spur
To hoped-for life, and certain, bargained hell!
Sounding from out the night behind me came
One piercing scream of hapless agony;
Then all was hushed, and doubly cold and still.
No one save God would ever hear him more.

A hunter found me at the desert's edge,
And through his care my ebbing life returned;
But what a life! At night in sleep I hear
Those never-ending nor forgotten sounds—
The gallop, gallop of that horse's hoofs,
That wailing cry; and then I, moaning, wake,
To curse my fate that I was ever born.

Oh, would that life might end in nothingness,
A broken bubble and an empty dream,
By one swift step to Nature, whence we came;
But dust returns to dust and life to life,
Ever to live beneath the seal of choice.

Racked by despair, I turned to Charity
And fed the hungry poor with lavish hand,
Only to find that Satan laughs in glee
At futile strivings with incumbent fate.

Drink will not drown my endless misery,
Nor grant the sodden respite that I crave.
So have I lived, and such my end will be.

I wish no prayers—I did not come to kneel—
I needed but to speak with man, not God.

A PURITAN MOTHER OF TO-DAY

My life is drawing to a destined close,
With all its weight of more than three score years
Of crushing, cruel time. Gone is my pride
In strength that hardly knew what weakness meant;
For I am doomed, and any hour may die.
No one will mourn, for I am now alone
With none to watch or murmur fond farewell.
Hard am I called—my life is judged aright—
I need no touch of selfish sympathy,
Nor crave the broken reed of human love.
Thank God! a sin with me is truly sin—
Not some slight nothing to be doubly hid
Behind a veil of smoothly-spoken words.

How brightly clear the glowing embers burn
A moment, life in every lambent flame,
Then follows death, with ashes cold and gray.
Hark! That is but the wind; the cruel moan
Is but the fir trees sighing in the wind.
And yet my son appeared before my face!
My son, my firstborn, only living child!
Why haunt me now? The past is better dead,
Forgotten, with your face and pleading words!

Oh! how he begged for pardon, or for hope,
In fervid tones, from out his very soul—
A chance to win again his mother's love!
Remorse is but repentance come too late:
His sin had thrust him out to living death,
And left me childless, old before my time.

Oh, any crime of crimes but brutal lust!
A minister of God, yet living steeped

In secret sin, and coarse carnality!
Then ended love, and I could bid him go,
Never a word of pardon to his face,
With never thought of pardon in my heart.
God gave the needed strength to cut the ties
That bound a widow to her only son;
For when the mask was snatched from off his face,
Revealing there a wretched hypocrite,
God rose and cursed him, speaking through my lips,
To endless doom ordained beyond recall.

I could have pardoned any open fault
In one who sinned, but scorned to hide the sin,
Who, fearing naught, would answer just reproach
With flashing eyes and devil-prompted words.
My son a weakling and a hypocrite!
Bone of my bone, my flesh, my living blood!
Come back, and I will pray with breaking heart,
Beseeching pardon at the mercy seat!

Too late! My son is dead, without the door,
Rejected, though he cried aloud for help!
Oh God! Thou Judge of all, is mine the sin
Beyond a hope of pardon at Thy hand?
A curse to Christ who died that we might live?
I know He said, "Judge not"; and I have judged!
He counselled love, and I have followed law
To all its bitter end.

No, God forbid!

For He hath chosen me; firm is my faith,
Since true conviction came and doubtings fled,
Leaving me strong, filled with abiding peace
Which rests on certainty. What are the words—
"Elected some to everlasting life?"—
And I by chance was chosen: he was doomed
To death eternal through eternity!
Oh! is the rock of my salvation gone,
Changed to the quicksand of delusive hope,

Engulfing all who cry in time of need?
Shall I be found upon the Judgment Day
With Pharisees who hear the fatal words,
"Depart from me, ye cursed!" while my son
Is welcomed with the dying blood-bought thief,
Sinning yet still repentant, on the cross?

What morbid thoughts are these that dwell on death
And borrow darkness when the body droops?
In all my days I strove so hard for right,
Regardless of another's praise or blame,
Knowing full well the sinless road I chose,
Content to wait until the Master's word
Bids me approach to grasp the victor's crown.
If I had stooped to gloss the stains of guilt,
Could I have dared to face the judgment day?
No! Selfish love that weakly yields to love
Is but an instinct born of human flesh,
A cunning lure of Satan's tempting guile.

Ah me! I followed what I felt was right:
As I have sowed, so shall I reap in kind.
To-morrow's sun will scatter all these vague,
Half-uttered questionings, the creatures born
Of brooding thoughts, and I shall be myself.

*But when the dim gray light of morning came,
A servant found her sitting, dead and cold,
And on her face the frightened girl perceived
The same grim smile she feared so much in life.*

CERTAINTY

Have we but these few meagre years
Of dreary toil and never-ending strife,
Bereft of hope, to quiet selfish fears,
Or promise change within a future life?

We know not whence we came, nor whither bound—
If life has been before, or yet shall be:
From out the grave there comes no certain sound—
“The dead shall live”—but all is mystery.

Our hopes are but the echoes of a past,
When creeds were crude, and Pan was strong to save;
Now light has gone, and night is overcast,
Yet must we blindly journey towards the grave.

The few brief years—what profit do they give?
A dole of pleasure and a wealth of pain.
How bare is life, and yet we long to live,
Though knowing that our longing will be vain.

Eternal life! Oh, more than hollow sound!
Why still delude the hapless race of men
Whose goal is here within the silent ground—
Then endless sleep, beyond all human ken?

While Truth endures, to rule and conquer all,
I welcome Truth, and thrust the false away,
Awaiting every ill that may befall,
Regardless what the world may think or say.

*Ah, somehow, the thought of my blessed love
Whom I loved and lived for in days gone by,
Came into my heart from a Heaven above,
And it changed my wisdom, I know not why;*

*For I saw her look, and my logic failed;
All my tripping reasons grew poor and faint:
I am thine, oh Christ! for this love availed,
And the false has vanished, with all its taint.*

RETRIBUTION

There stands before me, ever in my sight,
A jewelled casket, wrought by Eastern hands,
And from its summit, sparkling in the light,
There glows an opal, set in silver strands.

No precious gems nor gold does this contain,
Nor tender trifles kissed when life was fair;
But words of how a woman's life was vain,
And how her end was darkened by despair.

Before these words of anguish came to me,
The one who wrote was dead and in her grave.
Oh, God forbid that life is yet to be,
Or men have souls that they should strive to save!

I loved this woman, with a hungry love—
Not deep, nor true, nor setting all at naught,
Nor raising high the soul to things above—
But frail, and out of evil was it wrought.

This madness waxed and waned till, in its place,
A half-regretted thought, mayhap, remained
Of foolish fondness for a laughing face—
An idle hour—an evil end attained.

But now she haunts me as I sit alone
Before the dreary past that will not lie,
And from the silence comes a stifled moan
That tells of death—and yet I do not die!

Here, then, amid my books I muse and pray,
Yet doomed to watch the opal's changing glow;
What words its speaking colors seem to say,
The dead and I alone can ever know.

TRUE LOVE

My darling, when you turn your face to me,
Whereon is seen that look of holy love,
I bow my head in true humility,
To murmur words of praise to God above.

Then troubles flee, and joyous thoughts appear,
The sounding sea, the rising of the sun,
God's mountains in the springtime of the year,
And deeds of valiant worth that men have done.

As you are true, I would that truth were mine,
To mould my life in every act and thought,
With all the perfect peace of faith divine
For which my restless soul has ever sought.

If love were less, I would more often fall
When duty's ways appear so hard and long,
And murmur, "Life is dull and faults are small—
Who knows that God will call our weakness wrong?"

Yet if I turn aside, I see your face,
With wistful eyes that have no taint of sin,
Feel then anew my need of saving grace,
And pray for strength to fight the foe within.

My darling, when you turn your face to me,
Whereon is seen that look of holy love,
I bow my head in true humility,
To murmur words of praise to God above.

PIUS IX. AND ANTONELLI

Be seated, Antonelli. Day has dawned
With vague, insensate murmurs of a doom
Beyond the utmost point that I can bear.
Gone is my courage, gone the dauntless heart
That in my younger days derided fate
And brightened all the future with its fire.
Gone! It was dead and buried here at Rome
Before they thrust me forth with jeering cries,
A fugitive, to beg the Bourbons' aid.
Heart's brother—more than friend—in former years
You craved my help, when weighted down by care:
This day I need your loving sympathy,
To soothe my grief and dissipate the gloom,
As David's music calmed the stricken king
And drove the evil spirit from his soul.
Last night, while all the bells rang out the hours,
Counting their strokes, I strove for sleep in vain,
From endless dwelling on forbidding thoughts—
Of changing fortune and of chosen fates—
The low exalted and the high brought low—
Yet ever turned in thought to crucify
My soul with stinging tortures of remorse.
Where is the Church's stately heritage?—
Lost at my hand, and I must bear the blame;
Mine was the fault, for I was at the helm;
Mine were the eyes that saw, the ears that heard,
The brain that blundered, and the will that failed;
And Rome, my Rome, the Church's Holy Rome,
Is now a plaything of a petty king!

While longing for the day to lighten all with dawn,
Unstrung by changing tides of surging thoughts,
There came a vision of the future, void

Of any hope, and bringing but despair.
In craven fear I watched, as through the room
Around me thronged a group of troubled men,
With aged faces and with aching forms.
On every brow, above the lambent eyes,
Was firmly stamped that startled, hunted look
The mirror shows so deeply marked on mine:
A silence of the grave hung over all.
Were they the dead, sent back to haunt the earth,
Or angel messengers of coming good?
The dead, mayhap, for grief and human pain
Can never dwell upon an angel's face.
Were they the living? Nay, the Vatican
Still bars its gates against unbidden guests.
Shaken and wan, I watched the silent host,
But ere a moment passed, the truth was known:
These were the spirits of the coming Popes,
The line expectant, passing throughout time,
Sent to reproach me for my stewardship.
Then each in turn drew near, and, making mock,
With pointed finger and with stinging words,
Passed by and left me hearing but the sounds,
"Behold the Pius IX who lost our Rome!"

Why was this vision sent? Was it for sin
That I was chosen for such punishment?—
A prince of princes, yet a captive, held
In golden chains upon a gilded throne,
To suffer curse of friends and gibe of foes—
Where has the world seen such another fate?

When we were trustful, in those early days,
The siren sounds of so-called Liberty
Rang through the land and charmed our willing ears
With sweetest harmony. Then Freedom seemed
The chosen servant of the Lord of Hosts,
Sent to His Church to serve us in our need.
Year after year I dreamed of Italy

United in the bonds of Christian rule,
With Holy Church beloved and paramount;
The nation praising me for Liberty.
Wiser than I, the Jesuits perceived
How danger lurks behind the fairest front,
Foreseeing that if Freedom should prevail
The Church would suffer and its light grow dim.
Yet was I deaf to reason, blind to fate,
Intent on carving out a new career
By winning more than ever Pope had won.
Alas! If I had hearkened to the truth,
I would have found a foe with knife in hand,
Waiting to seize God's holy heritage,
To thrust the steel within the heart of Rome.
This is the course that Freedom ever takes;
Its dying spark, when fanned to living flame,
Consumes the throne and overturns the state.
Too late I woke to find my light a fire,
Spreading a conflagration far and wide,
With fear before and ruin in its wake.

Such was the primal folly of my life,
Repented of in sorrow and in shame,
Until I loathed the sound of Liberty
And longed to throttle Freedom till it died.
What Wisdom taught is best summed up in this:
"Cling to the old, let not the new prevail,
Oppose the very semblance of a change."
Hallowed by use and sanctified by age,
The Church's ways grew ever doubly mine,
Through words that spoke with no uncertain sound,
Through deeds that proved my daily faithfulness;
Till I was honored far beyond my wish,
And by the council made infallible,
The final judge of what we should believe.—
Would God that I had died upon that day,
Before the future sent its curses home
To drag me down, dishonored, to my grave.

Was I in fault again, or was it fate
That France became the champion of faith,
The well-loved son in whom we put our trust,
Battling for God against the heretic?
A new crusade was needed in the world
To crush the Prussian power, restore the past,
And give to God His old accustomed sway:
Then we would rule and renovate the world,
Till all had learned to dread the wrath of Rome.
Ah! but it seemed so well-devised and sure—
France and the Church against the upstart race
That overwhelmed our faithful Austria,
And thrust her down with those who gnash their teeth.

True were the words that one of old has said—
“Trust not in France, she ever plays you false.”
When Rome has suffered most through evil days,
Has France not proved this adage doubly true?
Why did King Otho spurn the Master’s call,
Afraid to cross a dreaded rival’s will?
Why were the French ill led and ill prepared,
Their leaders helpless, though they wished us well?
Why were we fooled by cunning, false reports
That told the future ere the fight began?
Alas! We looked on shadows, not on things,
Helpless in darkness, lured and led astray
By what we wished, in place of that which was!
Then we awoke to stern reality,
The broken promise, and the end of all!
A Godless king in hostile Italy,
France a republic, lost for many a year,
While Prussia clutches Europe by the throat,
The incarnation of Germanic force.

A servant’s failings are forgotten soon;
But with the Pope, his office bears the brunt
Of clashing conflict, or of peace serene,
Linking his name with every turn of time,
To live in praise, or linger on in shame!

My lot is failure and my race is run;
So shall the record of my life be judged
In all its cruel nakedness of truth.

If all my vision prove a troubled dream,
An empty figment of a tired brain,
Yet shall I never cease to hear those words—
"Behold the Pius IX, who lost our Rome!"
That dreary sentence is my epitaph,
Although its words are spoken not in stone.
All hope has vanished, never to return.
Bearing my burdens to the bitter end,
May I have strength to do the Master's work!

*Pray tell me what the Spaniard had to say.
We left the matter till he made reply.*

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